Baseball: Diverse Books for Kids

Baseball is an all-American game, and yet it wasn't always easy for people from diverse backgrounds to play the beloved sport professionally. These books, some of which are bilingual, celebrate some of baseball's unforgettable historic and modern pioneers, as well as the ways in which the game brought people together during tough times.

For more great baseball stories, check out the following booklists from our sister sites:

Reading Rockets: Take Me Out to the Ball Park booklist
AdLit.org: Baseball Books
A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie "Peanut" Johnson
By: Michelle Green
Age Level: 9-12
In the 1950's, current Marylander Mamie Johnson became one of only a handful of women to play professional baseball when she signed for the Indianapolis Clowns of the Negro Leagues. Sports fans and those who like stories about strong young women will find this equally appealing.

Baseball Bats for Christmas
By: Michael Kusugak
Illustrated by: Vladyana Krykorka
Age Level: 6-9
Product Description: In 1955, Rocky Parsons, the bush pilot, drops off a bunch of Christmas trees in Repulse Bay much to the delight of the kids who have never before seen a tree. What do you do with a bunch of spindly trees, the purposes of which are not immediately apparent? Play baseball, of course! An autobiographical tale from Michael Kusugak's childhood tells a story of life in the arctic, and shows how easily different cultures can interpret things differently.
In this photo essay, Henry Horenstein introduces us to Hubaldo, a boy in Caracas who lives and breathes baseball. We get to see the sport and the country of Venezuela through his eyes, from his league team to attending games with his father to collecting baseball cards to all of the different ways and places people play baseball throughout the country. Young baseball fans will recognize the same love for the game they share in Hubaldo!

Baseball on Mars

What do you get when put together an old barrel, a few boards, a steering wheel, and a lucky chair? A rocket to Mars, of course! Join a young boy and his father as they take an exciting journey to the stars and get ready to play the first game of baseball in outer space. Bilingual text.

Baseball Saved Us

During World War II, Japanese Americans were placed in internment camps. Isolated and bored, baseball became a life and soul-saving pastime which successfully brought very different people together. Darkly hued illustrations evoke the difficulty of the time, based on the author's family story. Spanish version available.
In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson
By: Bette Bao Lord
Illustrated by: Marc Simont
Age Level: 9-12
Language: English
Meet Shirley Temple Wong, a delightful heroine who has come from China and arrived in Brooklyn in 1947 — the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson. Based on the author's own experiences, the story captures the highs and lows of coming to live in a new country, learning English, and falling in love with the Brooklyn Dodgers during moments that are both heartbreaking and hilarious. A must-read for teachers working with ELLs and newcomer students.

Louis Sockalexis: Native American Baseball Pioneer
By: Bill Wise
Illustrated by: Bill Farnsworth
Age Level: 6-9
On a Maine summer day in 1884, twelve-year-old Penobscot Indian Louis Sockalexis first fell in love with baseball. As he grew up, Louis honed his skills and dreamed of one day joining a major league team. Louis encountered opposition at every turn, from the jeers of teammates and the taunts of spectators to the disapproval of his father. With determination, courage, and quiet dignity, Louis Sockalexis smashed racial barriers and home runs, leaving an indelible mark on America's favorite sport.
Out of the Ballpark

This story, written by baseball superstar Alex Rodriguez, is inspired by his childhood passion for baseball — which included getting up at 5 a.m. to practice! Find out how Alex decides to fix his mistakes on the field as a big championship game approaches. Warm, vivid pastel illustrations bring Alex, his home baseball diamond, and the tropical background to life. Spanish version available.

Play Ball!

By: Jorge Posada Robert Burleigh
Illustrated by: Raúl Colón
Age Level: 6-9

Product Description: Jorge loved the feel of the ball in his glove, the bat in his hand, and the game of baseball. Day and night he would play with his sister, his father, and his friends. At night he dreamed of baseball. When he and his mother visit New York and he sees Yankee Stadium for the first time, he knows there is only one way to get there: work hard and play ball. Based on the childhood of New York Yankees catcher Jorge Posada, this is the story of a boy from Puerto Rico who grew up to be a champion.
Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates
By: Jonah Winter
Illustrated by: Raúl Colón
Age Level: 6-9
This moving tribute is the perfect introduction to Roberto Clemente. Readers will learn of his humble beginnings, the challenges he faced in a new country, and his unprecedented accomplishments as one of the greatest baseball players in history. Even more importantly, readers will come to understand the way that Clemente's generosity shaped so much of his life — and his untimely death. Raúl Colón's impressionistic yet evocative illustrations enhance the emotional impact of the text.

She Loved Baseball: The Effa Manley Story
By: Audrey Vernick
Illustrated by: Don Tate
Age Level: 3-6
Effa Manley, born when jazz was new and sports were segregated, was passionate about fairness and baseball. She was to become the first woman inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame along with players from the Negro Baseball League. Her life is presented in stylized illustration and clear text, for an intriguing portrait of a person and a time.
Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh
By: Uma Krishnaswami
Age Level: 9-12
Language: English
Nine-year-old Maria Singh longs to play softball in the first-ever girls' team forming in Yuba City, California. It's the spring of 1945, and World War II is dragging on. Miss Newman, Maria's teacher, is inspired by Babe Ruth and the All-American Girls' League to start a girls' softball team at their school. Meanwhile, Maria's parents - Papi from India and Mama from Mexico - can no longer protect their children from prejudice and from the discriminatory laws of the land.

Take Me Out to the Yakyu
By: Aaron Meshon
Age Level: 6-9
Language: English
You may know that baseball is the Great American Pastime, but did you know that it is also a beloved sport in Japan? Come along with one little boy and his grandfathers, one in America and one in Japan, as he learns about baseball and its rich, varying cultural traditions.
There's No Base Like Home

By: Jessica Mendoza
Illustrated by: Ruth McNally Barshaw
Age Level: 9-12

This is going to be twelve-year-old Sophia Maria Garcia’s best year ever: she’s going out for the same softball team on which her high-school softball star sister played at her age, and she's starting middle school. New school, new Sophia! But all does not go according to plan. Sophia does not make the Waves softball team, and making friends at her new school does not go well. Maybe Sophia isn't the pitcher she thought she might be. And her best friend is drifting away, getting interested in boys and losing interest in Sophia.

We Are the Ship: The Story of the Negro League Baseball

By: Kadir Nelson
Age Level: 9-12

An introduction by baseball great Hank Aaron opens this riveting look at the history of the Negro League. A large format supports revealing portraits of League players and an absorbing narration revealed in nine innings. Endnotes and further readings conclude this memorable and accessible history.
¡Béisbol!: Latino Baseball Pioneers and Legends

By: Jonah Winter

Age Level: 9-12

This collection profiles 14 Latino baseball pioneers (Roberto Clemente, Bobby Avila, etc.) who played during the first half of the 20th century, often in the Negro Leagues or winter leagues of Latin America. Readers will learn about the group's accomplishments, including the barriers they had to overcome and how they paved the way for today's Latino baseball stars.

Colorín Colorado is a national multimedia project that offers a wealth of bilingual, research-based information, activities, and advice for educators and families of English language learners (ELLs). Colorín Colorado is an educational service of WETA, the flagship public broadcasting station in the nation's capital, and receives major funding from the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association. © Copyright 2019 WETA Public Broadcasting.

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Baseball in the Barrios
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